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Yel'tsin's Political Objectives (U)

An Intelligence Assessment

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SOV 91-10026X
June 1991

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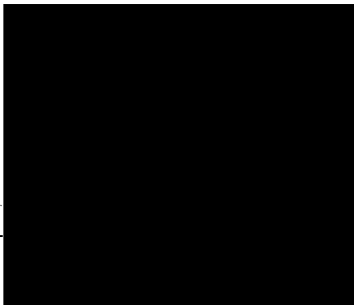
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Yel'tsin's Political Objectives (U)

An Intelligence Assessment

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This paper was prepared by [REDACTED] Office
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Yel'tsin's Political Objectives (U)

Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 28 May 1991
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Boris Yel'tsin's goals reflect a coherent Russian democratic alternative to the imperial authoritarianism of the traditionalists. These goals include promotion of the material well-being and moral regeneration of the Russian people; an approach to marketization that is little different from capitalism; constitutional democracy; national self-determination; and insistence on nonviolent solution of societal conflicts. Yel'tsin understands how these goals are interrelated and what their implications are, and he has integrated them closely with strategies of implementation. Moreover, in test situations he has consistently pursued them in practice, even at substantial political cost. The often-heard charge that Yel'tsin is an unprincipled opportunist whose future behavior is thoroughly unpredictable is not borne out by his actions. [REDACTED]

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Yel'tsin played a major part in turning around a situation that looked grim in January, and he has made significant steps toward realizing his strategic objectives. He has helped avert repression of the democrats by Soviet military and security forces and has initiated processes that may in time give the Russian government a share of control over military and KGB elements based in the Russian Republic. He has overcome traditionalist resistance to creation of the post of an elective president of Russia and looks nearly certain to become the first such president. He has also had some success in beginning to build Russian Republic power in the economic sphere. Finally, he has apparently managed to maintain momentum in cementing "horizontal" ties between the RSFSR and other republics despite differences of political and economic interests with various republics and their leaders. [REDACTED]

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Once he is elected president of Russia, Yel'tsin will seek to move ahead with rapid marketization in an environment of accelerating economic chaos, social turmoil, and political struggle with the Communist Party apparatus. He has expressed interest in the talks now under way on a major, "Marshall Plan" type of Western assistance package in return for radical economic reform and might welcome IMF conditionality that placed some of the responsibility for painful steps on someone else's shoulders. He is certain to emphasize that aid should be channeled primarily through the republics and to specific projects, not open-endedly to the center. [REDACTED]

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Yel'tsin favors a fundamentally reconstituted, decentralized union because he believes this is in Russia's interest. But his approach to the union is also grounded in a judgment that non-Russian nationalism is a reality that will not disappear, that attempts to suppress it will be counterproductive, and that such attempts will spread repression to the RSFSR and have other pernicious consequences. The "order" and "stability" projected in President Gorbachev's vision of the union is—in Yel'tsin's view—inherently *unstable* because it denies the striving for national self-determination. True stability now will come only with a genuinely voluntary association of republics, and this inevitably implies a major devolution of power and acceptance of secession for those union republics that want it. [REDACTED]

How to handle nationalism is now a cardinal concern of the central and Russian governments. The problem is how to steer a course between the reimposition of repressive imperial rule and the possible "Lebanonization" of the Soviet Union. And a key aspect of this problem is the "autonomies" issue in the RSFSR. This spring, in attempting to stop Yel'tsin, Gorbachev and his allies were prepared for a while to apply to the Russian Republic the "divide and conquer" tactic of exploiting minority nationality aspirations already practiced by them in the non-Russian republics. By promoting the possible separate membership of current "autonomous" ethnic components of the RSFSR in a future "renewed" union, they were in effect calling into question the territorial-administrative integrity of the Russian Republic—an invitation to endless ethnoviolence. At the moment it appears that Gorbachev and Yel'tsin may have found a compromise political solution to the problem. Gorbachev himself may either have come to appreciate the danger of playing with fire, or simply have been forced to give in to reach accord with Yel'tsin and other republic leaders on 23 April in the "nine-plus-one" agreement. Nevertheless, the "autonomies" issue will remain a possible source of major trouble in the RSFSR for the foreseeable future. [REDACTED]

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An even more explosive dimension of the "Lebanon" problem for Soviet leaders is protecting Russian and other minorities living outside their "native" republics. Success or failure on this score will go far toward determining whether endemic communal violence is the future of Eurasia, or whether there will come about a more peaceful dismantlement of the empire and the establishment of a relatively large and stable successor formation to the present USSR. One approach, toward which Gorbachev has leaned, is the wager on external intimidation, provocation, and limited intervention. Yel'tsin argues that this tactic will not work, offering instead an approach based on legal protection of minorities through treaties signed between republics. Such an approach, which accepts rather than denies republic sovereignty, offers at least a chance—he believes—of dealing with

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the ethnic minority problem in a way that does not reinforce a cycle of repression, retaliation, and flight of refugees. The costs of miscalculation and failure here are very high indeed, for the West as well as Moscow. [REDACTED]

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How the process of arriving at a new division of power in the USSR comes out will be determined above all by negotiations between republic leaders and Gorbachev begun on 23 April, which are intended to lead to signature of a union treaty. These negotiations represent the most recent and important element in a strategic retreat by Gorbachev to positions that may permit him to defend his type of union and the "socialist choice" more effectively than would continued adherence to inflexible unitarism. Gorbachev apparently made this latest move because he had become convinced that he would have no chance of preventing economic disaster and social upheaval unless he obtained cooperation from the republics and aid from the West. While Yel'tsin came out somewhat ahead, perhaps, in the Joint Statement of 23 April, much of what he claims to have gotten from the talks took the form of promises not recorded in the text. Gorbachev has not agreed with Yel'tsin's characterization of the talks as a form of "round-table" negotiation, and Yel'tsin's success will depend greatly on the results of the hard bargaining that lies ahead. [REDACTED]

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Yel'tsin's Political Objectives (U)

Introduction

More than any current leader, Boris Yel'tsin has inspired passionate feelings of approval or reprobation among Soviet elites. His supporters see him as the best hope for democracy and a peaceful dismantling of the Soviet empire. They acknowledge certain personality flaws, his socialization in the authoritarian milieu of the Communist Party apparatus, and his penchant for impetuous action at home and contretemps abroad; but they point to his capacity to learn, to maneuver skillfully in the new Russian parliamentary arena, and to assemble and listen to colleagues and advisers who—collectively—outshine those of Mikhail Gorbachev. Yet, even among those closest to him programmatically and politically, some are bothered by what they see as his readiness to compromise unwisely. Others have doubted his commitment to democratic values and detected lurking authoritarian tendencies. Yel'tsin's past as a Communist Party boss, and fear of an unhealthy yearning for a strong leader they attribute to the public at large, weigh heavily on the thinking of this group. [REDACTED]

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Detractors criticize Yel'tsin as overly ambitious, psychologically volatile, intellectually shallow, politically opportunistic, and lacking in any stable policy orientation besides opposition to the powers-that-be. Some argue that he is a closet Russian chauvinist who will reveal his true colors once he has the opportunity of replacing Gorbachev. Most of his critics characterize as "demagoguery" what is seen by large numbers of ordinary citizens as that rarest of qualities among Soviet politicians, the capacity to speak the truth. Weighing heavily on the thinking of detractors is a possible future of popular upheaval and anti-Communist retribution they believe they see reflected in the image of Yel'tsin. [REDACTED]

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Most of the journalistic and analytical attention devoted to Yel'tsin has focused on his personality, his conflict with Gorbachev, and his tactical maneuvering; his larger-than-life persona and remarkable political odyssey invite this. Yet, important as the personality and behavioral issues are, no less important are Yel'tsin's goals and strategies—which tend to be overlooked.¹ It is this dimension of Yel'tsin that led President Nixon to observe that the biggest surprise of his recent trip to the USSR was Yel'tsin, whom he found to be a man of keen understanding and commitment to reform. The present paper takes as a given that Yel'tsin is a complex individual who is personally ambitious, egocentric, impulsive, perhaps insecure, and sometimes difficult to deal with, and concentrates instead on his political objectives. Contrary to the stereotype, Yel'tsin *does* have goals that he has been consistently pursuing, and strategies for realizing them. These are important not only because they drive his actions, but also because they reflect in broad outline a coherent Russian democratic alternative to the imperial authoritarianism of the traditionalists. [REDACTED]

Goals

Yel'tsin's public statements over the past year, his political behavior, and intelligence information suggest that he has been pursuing four or five major interrelated political [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

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Russian Welfare

Yel'tsin's paramount objective has been to promote the material well-being and moral regeneration of the Russian people living within the boundaries of what is now the Russian Republic (RSFSR). His brand of Russian nationalism does not seek to impose Russian domination on neighboring countries or on the other republics, nor to discriminate against the non-Russian nationalities living in the "autonomous" ethnic regions and elsewhere in the RSFSR—although it does imply the incorporation of the "autonomies" within an integral "Russian" federation. Yel'tsin's promotion of Russian welfare means rejecting the burden of empire; where conflicts of economic interest among the republics are concerned, it opposes "subsidizing" other republics at the expense of Russia. Internally, the goal of Russian welfare means more butter, fewer guns; externally, it implies integration with the West.

Effective Marketization

Yel'tsin's record of support for a rapid approach to marketization involving major privatization and not simply "destatization" is clear. He backed the Shatalin Plan, and he helped push through the Russian parliament a law on landownership, which—while not as radical as he wanted—was nevertheless a major breakthrough. He has been campaigning vigorously for the establishment of private farms. He has avoided bashing the co-ops and "speculators," is supporting the legal reform necessary for a market economy, and has encouraged the creation of free economic zones in various parts of the RSFSR. He has supported joint ventures with the West. And he is currently pushing, with Chairman of the Russian Council of Ministers Silayev, a renewed radical marketization initiative keyed to entrepreneurship.

Political Union

Yel'tsin's critics, who accuse him of seeking to dismember the union of Soviet republics, are both right and wrong. Yel'tsin believes that the existing "union," represented by the present power structure in Moscow

and the central economic and security bureaucracies, is based on coercion, is incompatible with the welfare of Russia and other Soviet nations, and is doomed to extinction sooner or later by the dynamics of national self-assertion. He wants to liquidate *this* union now. But, he also favors creating a new political union that meets certain conditions. The building block of this structure is the "sovereign" republic/state, which voluntarily agrees to associate itself with other republic/states in a compact formed by agreement among legitimately elected governments of the republics. This union is formed "from the bottom up." The powers of the union authority at the center are delegated to it by the member states and are carefully delimited. The nature of such a union, implicitly, is basically confederal—although Yel'tsin has avoided this terminology.

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Workable Democracy

From Yel'tsin's perspective, establishing democracy in Russia and the union requires first dismantling the still-existing totalitarian political structures and defeating the traditionalist forces that have—indeed—been intent on destroying him and his pluralist allies. Yel'tsin's subjection of himself to three elections already is *prima facie* evidence of a commitment to democracy more impressive than that of leaders who have avoided such a test. Yel'tsin has, to be sure, displayed a readiness to exploit the opportunities provided by an embryonic parliamentary culture to weaken his opponents, but probably not as much as others—such as Chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet Anatoliy Luk'yanov. The special provisional powers he sought and obtained early in April, which his enemies claim are "dictatorial," have controls on them and are not comparable to those enjoyed at the union level by Gorbachev. And his approach to reshaping the central and local government of Russia indicates an appreciation of the need to balance stronger "executive" leadership and hierarchical authority with enhanced democratic checks and balances and institutionalization of the rule of law.

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Nonviolence

Crosscutting his other major political goals is Yel'tsin's systematic commitment to avoiding violence and seeking consent in the solution of societal problems. From his standpoint, state violence and intimidation generally have highly counterproductive effects. [REDACTED]

Strategies

Yel'tsin has pursued strategic objectives that follow logically from the goals sketched above. Grouped under the appropriate goals, these strategies are as follows:

- To promote Russian interests:

- Seek to reconfigure the union on a voluntary basis.
- Pursue a federal solution to the problem of "autonomous" ethnic components in the Russian Republic.
- Transfer ownership of natural wealth and a dominant degree of government supervision of the economy from the center to the republics.
- Shift resources from military spending to consumption.
- Reduce Russian Republic transfer payments to other republics and channel them directly to recipient republics rather than through the center in order to enhance Russian negotiating leverage.
- Gear foreign policy initiatives to the promotion of Russian "sovereignty" without feeding foreign suspicions that the Russian government is "breaking up" the union; emphasize the economic component of foreign relations; and concentrate geographically on three concentric fields of activity: the other republics of the USSR; East Central Europe (including Germany), China, Japan, and South Korea; and the United States.

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- To promote marketization:

- Liquidate the central command-economic bureaucracy through fiscal nonsupport and avoid re-creation of a similar structure at the republic level.
- Use taxation and other financial mechanisms to steer the economy.
- Pursue rapid privatization of production property through a regulated and democratic process rather than through spontaneous arrogation of property by Communist Party officials and incumbent economic managers.
- End government price setting except for a very small class of goods; rapidly allow market-determined prices.
- Encourage foreign sellers to enter the domestic market as a means of combating monopolistic pricing.
- Seek to retain existing interrepublic production ties and expand the "common economic space" by distinguishing between *economic* union and *political* union and encouraging the former without requiring the latter.
- Actively encourage economic ties to the West.

- To promote new political union:

- Continue to assert the principle of republic sovereignty.²

² Yel'tsin has asserted not only Russian sovereignty, but also that of the other republics. This was the principle underlying the Shatalin Plan, which he publicly embraced, and it is incorporated in the treaties he has negotiated with other republics—including the Ukraine. For Ukrainians, Yel'tsin's visit to Kiev in November 1990 had extraordinary symbolic significance, because it represented the first time in the history that a Russian head of state had accepted the equality of the Ukraine and Russia. More recently, Yel'tsin's agreement in late March with the Georgian leader Zviad Gamsakhurdia to cooperate in pacifying "all unlawful formations on the territory of the former [sic] South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast" was premised on accepting Georgia's sovereignty despite predictable political fallout hostile to Yel'tsin across the border in the North Ossetian region of the Russian Republic and among others in the RSFSR. [REDACTED]

— Accept secession that is supported by the majority of a republic's population and demanded by the republic's legitimate government, and move on to economic and other forms of cooperation.³

— Deal with the "minority" problem as a matter of second-order importance. Renounce transrepublic intimidation to "defend" minorities, and rely instead on bilateral treaties among republics to protect minority rights.⁴

— Develop "horizontal" political and economic ties between the RSFSR and other republics.

— Seek to prevent the center from dominating the framing of the union treaty, and insist on final approval of the treaty by the supreme elected republic authorities.

— Gain agreement between the center and the republics on a division of powers and property *before* signature of the treaty.

— Create the post of a popularly elected president of the RSFSR to serve as a focal point for the assertion of Russian national interests.

³ Yel'tsin's immediate response to the Baltic crackdown in January was to go to Estonia and sign documents that in effect publicly recognized Baltic independence. He accepted the decision of legally elected representative assemblies as final. This step foreseeably involved major political costs for him: heavy criticism within the military; attacks on his patriotism by Russians in the RSFSR; and cries of betrayal from some Russians living in the Baltic republics.

This approach implies four imperatives: (1) attempt to convince the non-Russian republics of the RSFSR's good faith by accepting their declarations of independence/sovereignty and by accepting existing borders; (2) seek to protect Russian minority rights by entrenching them in obligations of bilateral treaties between the RSFSR and other republics, and use reciprocal treaty rights protecting the other party's nationals in the RSFSR and—if necessary—economic leverage as an inducement to compliance; (3) attempt to convince the Russian minority that the likely outcome of an attempt to defend their status through force will be an intensification of anti-Russian persecution, bloodshed, and—ultimately—their own flight as refugees back to Russia; and (4) try to head off provocation and conflict that will undermine the possibility of a peaceful, negotiated outcome.

— Attempt to create a fairly weak, republic-dominated leadership structure at the center in the new union.

• To promote democratization:

— Ward off repression by the army and security services.⁵

— Gradually establish some RSFSR control over military, KGB, and MVD forces based in Russia.

— Reopen access by democrats to radio and TV.

⁵ Much of Yel'tsin's tactical behavior between January and April 1991 can be explained by his perception that the traditionalists, abetted by Gorbachev, were conducting an orchestrated attack against him and the other democrats, the outcome of which was prefigured in the Baltic violence. Whether a physical crackdown was intended, and by whom, is not entirely clear—although considerable evidence does support the proposition that there was planning for such an operation. What is clear is that there was a major media campaign charging Yel'tsin with seeking to dismember the USSR; a concentrated effort to deny access by democrats to the media; mobilization of opposition to Yel'tsin within key bureaucracies, especially the military and the KGB; stimulation of opposition to Yel'tsin within the Russian Congress of People's Deputies and Supreme Soviet; activation of efforts by provincial organs of the Russian Communist Party to undercut Yel'tsin and democratic forces; various domestic KGB operations to undermine Yel'tsin and his allies; manipulation of politics in the "autonomous" regions to weaken the political cohesion of the RSFSR; and the conduct of "active measures" abroad designed to weaken foreign sympathy for Yel'tsin.

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- Dismantle the mechanisms of residual Communist Party control over the Soviet system through liquidating the party structure in key security bureaucracies and even workplaces in general, terminating combined occupancy of party and state leadership posts, and encouraging fractionation within the party membership at large.
- Accelerate the removal of traditionalists from elective office at all levels of authority: union, republic, and local.
- Introduce direct popular election not only of the Russian president, but also of the chairmen of soviets at all levels. This step would stiffen resistance to Communist attempts to reassert lateral control over government bodies and strengthen responsiveness by these local officials to laws enacted by the Russian government.
- Build pressure for real power sharing between Gorbachev's regime and pluralist forces in Soviet society. [REDACTED]

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Yel'tsin's Achievements

Yel'tsin has played a major part in turning around a situation that looked forbidding in January and has made some progress toward realizing his strategic objectives—even apart from the gains that flowed from the process initiated by the Joint Statement of nine republic leaders and Gorbachev on 23 April. Of five major achievements this spring that Yel'tsin can point to, a key one in his eyes is probably helping avert large-scale repression of the democrats by Soviet military and security forces. [REDACTED]

Closely associated with this achievement is his success in initiating processes that may in time give the Russian government a share of control over military and KGB forces based in the Russian Republic. In late January Yel'tsin managed to gain the appointment of Col. Gen. Konstantin Kobets, a deputy chief of the General Staff and RSFSR people's deputy, as

chairman of the new RSFSR Council of Ministers State Committee for Defense and Security. Along with this appointment went agreement in principle by the center to allow Russia (and other republics) to participate in certain functions heretofore monopolized by union authorities.⁶ Talks that had been going on for some months between Yel'tsin and KGB Chairman Kryuchkov and between Yel'tsin's security adviser, Col. Gen. Dmitriy Volkogonov, and Kryuchkov over shifting KGB assets to RSFSR control culminated in a preliminary agreement signed by Yel'tsin and Kryuchkov on 6 May establishing a Russian State Security Committee. A career KGB officer, Maj. Gen. Viktor Ivanenko, was appointed acting head of this new "union-republic" (that is, jointly subordinated) body. Commentary suggested that basic issues of defining "security" and delineating powers and functions between the RSFSR and union KGB organizations remained to be settled.

Yel'tsin's third area of achievement lay in his remarkably successful campaign to overcome traditionalist resistance to creation of the post of elective president of Russia, and to what now appears to be his near-certain success in gaining election as president. The legitimacy he will gain with election, and the major powers with which the position has now been vested by law, should give him significant new leverage to accomplish his objectives. [REDACTED]

⁶ General Moiseyev stated in *Krasnaya zvezda* on 21 February that the union treaty "must clearly state that questions of ensuring USSR state security, organizing defense and the leadership of the USSR armed forces and USSR border guard troops, internal troops, and railroad troops, declaring war, and concluding peace are exclusively within the USSR's jurisdiction." But the republics would enjoy competence by participating in "elaborating the union's military policy, implementing measures to organize and ensure defense, resolving questions of the deployment and activity of troops and military installations on their republic's territory, establishing a unified procedure for the draft and the performance of military service, organizing the national economy's preparation for mobilization, shaping the union's defense budget, and allotting material and technical resources for defense needs." [REDACTED]

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Yel'tsin has also had some success in beginning to build Russian Republic power in the economic sphere. He forced the center to allow the Russian Republic to draft its own budget and retain major tax revenues. He has increased Russia's input to spending decisions by assuming financial responsibility for funding republic education and science programs and by demanding a greater voice in allocating funds for maintaining Soviet troops in the republic. And his efforts persuaded some union enterprises, including several major metallurgical plants and mines, to "defect" to republic jurisdiction even before the miners' strike. The resolution of that strike shifted a key sector of industry (together with its massive financial and social problems) to Russian control and accelerated the transfer process in other sectors as well. [REDACTED]

Finally, Yel'tsin has apparently managed to maintain momentum in cementing "horizontal" ties between the RSFSR and other republics. There have been tensions in these relations, reflecting the different political and economic interests of various republics and their leaders in such areas as budgetary policy, retail price increases, and the status of Russian minorities. There was sharp disagreement over Yel'tsin's demand on 19 February for Gorbachev's resignation and transfer of power to the Federation Council. Yet by May it seemed that Yel'tsin had managed to reach substantial agreement on the central issue—the future union treaty—with the four other key republics (the Ukraine, Belorussia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan). [REDACTED]

The balance sheet on Yel'tsin's recent achievements ultimately depends, however, on one's view of what he gained and conceded in the process that began with the Joint Statement of 23 April, which is intended to lead to signing of the union treaty in July. Yel'tsin's critics on the democratic side have attacked him for endorsing an agreement that, they say, sacrifices the workers' movement (by incorporating an antistrike provision), preserves the command economy, commits the RSFSR to cough up funds for the center mainly to support military spending, and guarantees retention of power by Gorbachev and his team for a potentially endless "transition" period—all for smoke from Gorbachev. Yel'tsin, not surprisingly, pictures himself as the winner. [REDACTED]

In the text of the agreement itself,⁷ Gorbachev *did* get important up-front commitments by the republics to take near-term action that the center desperately wanted, primarily in the economic sphere: to fulfill their obligations to the all-union budget and extra-budget funds; to support "anticrisis" measures; to consent to a "special work regime" in key sectors of the economy; and to agree to a ban on strikes and on incitement of civil disobedience and appeals for the removal of the USSR Government. He also got the symbolic concession of inclusion of a reference to his referendum on the union. [REDACTED]

On his part, Yel'tsin got from the text of the agreement at least Gorbachev's implicit agreement on three important issues: that there would be no imposition of a state of "presidential rule" while the union treaty was being negotiated; that Gorbachev would reverse his attempt to weaken the Russian government's hand by playing the "autonomies" card; and that Gorbachev would no longer insist on the priority of USSR law over republic law. Yel'tsin also got two major symbolic concessions in the text: acknowledgement of republic "sovereignty," and use of the word "state" in place of "republic" in the title of the proposed agreement. He also got *promises* by Gorbachev of action over a longer time horizon that could have profound consequences: namely, "radical enhancement of the union republics' role," and a restructuring of the USSR Government with national elections, contingent on signature of the union treaty. [REDACTED]

It has also been argued, not least by Yel'tsin, that Gorbachev committed himself verbally at the 23 April meeting on a number of other points, including: the sovereignty and right to secede of the six republics that chose not to sign the agreement; nonintervention by the center in the internal affairs of republics; acceptance of the need to divide property between the republics and the center; an accord on dividing up hard currency and gold reserves; the need for republic

⁷ See FBIS-SOV 91-079, 24 April 1991, pp. 37-38. [REDACTED]

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agreement with decisions by the center to issue more currency; assignment to republics of the right of general licensing of products for export; the right of republics to retain hard currency earned on their territory; no hindrance to enterprises shifting from all-union to republic subordination; and the right of republics to adopt their own programs of marketization. [REDACTED]

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In the time that has elapsed since 23 April it has become apparent that Gorbachev has indeed given up ground and Yel'tsin has made some gains, but it also has become clear that the sides still fundamentally differ on where the whole process is leading, and critical questions are still under negotiation. Press commentary on a meeting between Gorbachev and the republic leaders on 24 May suggests that the key issues of the division of powers between the center and the republics, the center's capacity to tax, and the status of the "autonomies" in the future union are still unresolved. [REDACTED]

Reasons for Yel'tsin's Success

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The critical factor behind Yel'tsin's relative success this past spring has been the great political skill he has displayed in building popular support for his cause, maneuvering in what initially was a highly adverse parliamentary situation, rallying democratic forces, dividing his opponents, and capitalizing on counterproductive moves against him by the traditionalists. His charisma, candor, capacity to communicate credible moral outrage, empathy with the disadvantaged, and ability to elicit public sympathy for his own perceived human weaknesses are well-known aspects of his leadership. Less obvious but very important has been his ability to combine accurate political analysis, clear thinking about his objectives, and political strategy. Yel'tsin has shown a keen and hardheaded understanding of the shifting political dynamics of the domestic environment in which he has been operating. This realism, in turn, has contributed to an appreciation of the interdependency of goals that provides coherence and balance to his

political strategies and tactics.⁸ Finally, Yel'tsin has repeatedly demonstrated a willingness to seek compromise, whether the issue has been dealing with the strikers, the extent of Russian presidential authority, the transfer of powers from the center to the Russian government, or even the final character of the future union. [REDACTED]

Second, as Yel'tsin himself asserts, his achievements and those of the Russian democrats this spring have been based to no small degree on the deterrent influence on traditionalists of mass organized resistance to the center, and their fear of what might follow. Demonstrations in support of Yel'tsin, such as that of 28 March in Moscow, were significant. But it was clearly the persistence of the coal miners' strike, and the strike activity in Minsk, that brought home to traditionalists the magnitude of repression that would be required for a successful "crackdown" and the price—domestic and foreign—that would have to be paid. [REDACTED]

Third, Yel'tsin was aided in no small measure by the intrinsic weakness of the traditionalists, their lack of popular legitimacy, their absence of a competitive program and strong leadership, and their own inner divisions. This weakness was graphically displayed at the CPSU Central Committee plenum in late April when the Latvian Communist Party boss Alfred Rubiks—no friend of Gorbachev's—acknowledged

⁸ A review of Yel'tsin's statements [REDACTED] indicates his awareness of the multistranded interweaving of goals and analysis: (1) One cannot promote Russian welfare without (a) dropping the burden of empire, (b) marketizing the economy, and (c) cutting military expenditures; (2) one cannot marketize if one does not (a) dismantle the Stalinist system and create a climate of legality, (b) cut back the military-industrial complex, (c) resolve societal problems peacefully, and (d) gain Western economic collaboration; (3) one cannot achieve nonviolent solutions to societal problems without (a) eliminating totalitarian structures, (b) gaining voluntary resolution of ethnic conflicts, and (c) improving living standards; (4) one cannot achieve voluntary resolution of ethnic conflicts without (a) genuine self-determination, which implies (b) accepting the secession of those republics that wish to secede; and (5) one cannot conduct foreign relations that successfully promote Russian welfare without (a) marketization, (b) democratization, (c) nonviolent solution of societal issues, and (d) voluntary resolution of ethnic conflict. [REDACTED]

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that "Mikhail Sergeyevich's departure from either of the posts he holds would lead to the devastation of the Communist Party in the country and . . . to the revival of a national bourgeois dictatorship in the republic and the completion of the restoration of capitalism." In a *Pravda* article on 14 May, a hardline secretary of the Russian Communist Party, Aleksandr Mel'nikov, observed: "The situation within the CPSU is, certainly, critical. The poisoned fragments of political pluralism are doing their work. Organizationally the party has been reduced to the state of 'jelly'. There is no end to the breaches of party discipline." Mel'nikov may well have had in mind the formation by Col. Aleksandr Rutskoy of a "Communists for Democracy" faction that helped fracture the Communist vote and promote Yel'tsin's strategic victory at the Third RSFSR Congress of People's Deputies in early April. [REDACTED]

Fourth, Yel'tsin's success has hinged on the determination shown by other republics to protect their own "sovereignty." For example, despite conflicts of interest and ambition with Yel'tsin, the Kazakh leader Nazarbayev recently criticized Gorbachev for the "dishonesty" of his attempt to manipulate the "autonomies" issue against the Russian leadership (which also cut against the interests of the other republics). Yel'tsin has stated on several occasions recently that the solidarity of Russia and the other four big republics played a key role in forcing Gorbachev to compromise at his meetings with republic leaders on 23 April and 24 May. [REDACTED]

A last factor, but not the least, in explaining Yel'tsin's achievements has been an evolving recognition by Gorbachev and other Soviet leaders of the need—if mass repression is ruled out—to conduct a strategic retreat to positions that may permit them to defend their type of union and the "socialist choice" more effectively. Thus, behind the Kobets appointment as chairman of the RSFSR State Committee for Defense and Security in January evidently lay a policy decision by Gorbachev, Minister of Defense Yazov, and Chief of the General Staff Moiseyev to seek to preempt the creation of republic armies and achieve military objectives by agreeing to the formation of these republic committees, to a certain division of power between republics and the center in military affairs, and to the creation of "defense councils" at

the republic and local levels chaired by republic presidents and chairmen of soviets.⁹ The preemptive motive is probably even stronger in the decision to permit the creation of a Russian KGB. Kryuchkov has made no secret of his intention to preserve a unitary security system, and this objective is clearly expressed in the Law on State Security Bodies signed by Gorbachev on 16 May: "The USSR State Security Committee, the republics' state security bodies, and the bodies subordinate to them form a single system of the country's state security bodies." [REDACTED]

The crucial phenomenon inducing Gorbachev to agree to what Yel'tsin has characterized as a form of "roundtable" negotiation, however, has unquestionably been the mounting economic disaster. All the elements of the problem appear in Prime Minister Pavlov's speeches over the last two months. They include a:

- Critical shortfall in agreed republic contributions to the USSR budget, leaving planned income for the first quarter less than 40 percent of the target, and a deficit for the same period equal to that projected for the entire year.
- Steep and accelerating decline in industrial and food production.
- Serious drop in hard currency earnings, jeopardizing imports of foodstuffs and light industry supplies, and compounding a critical debt position.
- Projection of a situation by year's end marked by a drop in national income accelerating to 23 to 25 percent per year, a decline in per capita consumption of at least 15 to 20 percent, a sharp rise of unemployment leaving up to 18 million people without means of subsistence, and a "social explosion [that] will take place long before the calendar year expires."

⁹ Kobets has publicly observed that "it is virtually impossible to resolve the tasks that will, as a result of the union treaty, be placed under the joint jurisdiction of the union and the republics, without creating structures of this kind." [REDACTED]

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Pavlov has repeatedly acknowledged that, basically, force will not solve these problems. The two preconditions for dealing with them are an accord with the republics, without which there is no hope of restoring elementary order, and—he belatedly recognizes—large-scale foreign assistance. [REDACTED]

Problems and Prospects

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Despite his achievements, and even with the Russian presidency in hand, Yel'tsin faces a difficult path. He will still confront an enemy that has dominant influence within the repressive machinery of the military, KGB, and MVD, and also within the party apparatus—notwithstanding his inroads in these organizations. He and his democratic allies are physically still terribly vulnerable: "We are completely unprotected in Russia." Hardline elements in the military could still overwhelm moderates. And, of course, Yel'tsin could—as he fears—be assassinated. [REDACTED]

After the election on 12 June, Yel'tsin's battle with the traditionalists is likely to sharpen. The fact that the Communist Party apparatus has come out four-square against him in the election will simply intensify his interest in eradicating its political influence. And his effort to promote the privatization of agriculture, where the party retains some of its strongest roots, will accentuate his conflict with it. Meanwhile, he has already given notice that he intends after 12 June to proceed with "departyization"—the process of liquidating Communist Party organizations and party diktat in all government bodies and law enforcement agencies (the MVD, KGB, procuracy, courts, and so forth) and granting enterprises and other workplaces the right to decide themselves whether to evict party cells—which would lead to the collapse of party influence and disintegration of the party. The apparatus understands the mortal implications of "departyization" and will fight it tooth and nail. [REDACTED]

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Yel'tsin's assessment appears to be that Gorbachev's behavior is largely—but not entirely—determined by whatever political pressures are most threatening to his continued tenure of office at any given moment.

He also probably believes that Gorbachev's power, despite short-term ups and downs, is programmed for longer term decline. Yet, at the same time he appreciates the fact that Gorbachev's presence may provide the democrats with a certain element of protection against the extreme hardliners. Also, he has taken aboard the public's revulsion with what it sees as personally motivated "squabbling" between himself and Gorbachev. His handling of the Gorbachev factor, thus, has been highly tactical in nature. He believes that Gorbachev was *forced* to shift course in April, and he is prepared to work with this rapprochement as long as it lasts—especially until he gains the Russian presidency. But he certainly understands that Gorbachev's vision of the future union remains radically different from his own. And he can see that Gorbachev continues, even in the new "cooperative" setting, to seek to advance this vision. [REDACTED]

There is every prospect that the economic situation will continue to nosedive over the next six months, and public discontent will rise. Even if Gorbachev accedes to a major transfer of economic administrative authority to the RSFSR, the Russian government will not control all the levers it needs to cope with the problems it will face. Moreover, if the Russian government proceeds with the new version of the Shatalin Plan that premier Silayev has been talking about, the dislocation is likely to be still greater—and Yel'tsin has not prepared the population for what is in store during the transition to a market economy. Before all of this comes to a head, however, Yel'tsin is very likely to confront major renewed industrial unrest for failing to fulfill promises he will now be held accountable for by miners and others whose trust in him was significantly undercut by his endorsement of the antistrike pledge and his reversal on the demand for Gorbachev's removal. [REDACTED]

Once the election is over, Yel'tsin will still lack an effectively organized, united, extraparliamentary mass party base. Compromises he made in negotiating the terms of the 23 April agreement with Gorbachev,

and the expediency suggested by his selection of a liberal Communist as his vice-presidential running mate, have alienated some of his supporters within the Democratic Russia umbrella group that now provides his main backing. This group itself is beginning to fractionate as political orientations crystallize within it. The absence of disciplined party support will continue to make it difficult to achieve implementation of republic decisions by local government bodies. Yel'tsin has contributed to this problem by continuing to support the principle that the president and local soviet chiefs must not hold leadership positions in any political party—probably out of a tactical concern to weaken the Communist Party's influence. Thus he finds himself in the contradictory position of seeking to strengthen hierarchical responsiveness by local officials who are in principle accountable to popularly elected soviets. [REDACTED]

Yel'tsin cannot expect smooth sailing with other republics either. Despite efforts to fulfill the terms of bilateral economic agreements, tensions are likely to build as noncompliance continues. Different approaches to marketization will produce new strains. There is an inherent conflict of interest between the RSFSR and those republics, especially the Central Asian bloc, that are highly dependent on assistance from "the center." And the status of Russian minorities in other republics, whom he must defend, is almost certain to get worse before it gets better however successful Yel'tsin is in signing treaties protecting their rights. [REDACTED]

Implications for the United States

The political values espoused by Yel'tsin are closer to American values than those of any other major Russian leader: nonxenophobic, nonaggrandizing nationalism; constitutional democracy; an approach to marketization that is little different from capitalism; national self-determination; and nonviolent solution of societal conflict. The charge that Yel'tsin is a political "opportunist" whose future behavior is totally unpredictable—that his behavior is uninfluenced by these principles—has been disproved by his actions to date; he has demonstrated a commitment to these values in

situations that have involved political loss. He has been "opportunistic" on promises to the electorate and on some tactical issues, however, where he has also shown a penchant for snap decisions sometimes influenced by emotion. [REDACTED]

Because of the coincidence of his values with American values, Yel'tsin looks to the United States for support. He faults the US administration for failing—in his view—to understand sufficiently who its true allies and what its true interests really are in the Soviet Union. Once elected president of Russia, Yel'tsin will almost certainly use this victory to underscore to the United States that:

- Whatever reservations Washington may earlier have had about treating him as an important state figure now lack justification.
- The republics are now where the action is. And the one republic whose future is truly critical to global security and US interests is Russia.
- He has, in any event, displayed a real willingness to compromise and work with Gorbachev.
- Deeper US contact with Russia need not imply abandonment of Gorbachev and sacrifice of immediate US foreign policy interests. On the contrary, such contact might strengthen Gorbachev's resistance to traditionalist pressures. [REDACTED]

Yel'tsin and his government are likely to attempt to introduce radical economic reform measures soon. He has already expressed interest in the current Yavlinskiy-brokered negotiation of a Western assistance package, but only if there is strong conditionality. He is certain to emphasize that aid should be channeled primarily through the republics and to specific projects, not open-endedly to the center. He may welcome IMF "directives" that would absorb some of the heat generated by painful steps required by marketization. [REDACTED]

Yel'tsin favors a fundamentally reconstituted union in which the republics act independently within broad areas and delegate only limited powers to the center because he believes it is in Russia's interest. But this position does not mean, from his standpoint, that Gorbachev should be praised for preserving "order" and "stability" in the USSR and that he (Yel'tsin) should be attacked for undermining what the United States sees as *its* interest in the country. Analytically, Yel'tsin's approach to the union issue is grounded in a judgment that non-Russian nationalism is a reality that will not—as many well-meaning Russians seem to hope—go away, that attempts to suppress it will be counterproductive, and that such attempts will only spread repression to the RSFSR and have other pernicious consequences. The slightly altered union "order" preferred by Gorbachev is—in Yel'tsin's view—inherently *unstable* because it denies the striving for national self-determination. True stability will come only with a genuinely voluntary association of republics, and this inevitably implies major devolution of power and acceptance of secession for those union republics that want it. Where precisely the point of equilibrium lies appears to be negotiable for Yel'tsin and probably depends in part on the positions adopted by the representatives of the other major republics. In the 24 May round of talks—perhaps to boost his electoral prospects—he agreed to the formulation that the union should be a "federation" rather than a confederation, suggesting that he may believe he can get workable arrangements within a somewhat less decentralized configuration than he was earlier demanding. [REDACTED]

A central concern of the West in the future of the Soviet Union is the possibility of "Lebanonization," which is already occurring both across republic boundaries and within republics and could easily expand to include many areas in the RSFSR. One aspect of this problem, as already noted, is the "autonomies" issue in the RSFSR. This spring, in attempting to stop Yel'tsin, Gorbachev and his allies were prepared for a while to extend to the Russian Republic the "divide and conquer" tactic of exploiting minority nationality aspirations already practiced by them in the non-Russian republics. By promoting the possible separate membership of current "autonomous" ethnic components of the RSFSR in a future

"renewed" union—and thus outbidding Yel'tsin on "self-determination"—they were in effect calling into question the territorial-administrative integrity of the Russian Republic. At the moment, it appears that Yel'tsin has been able to find a political solution to this problem, which was a difficult one for him both because he had to explain why what is necessary for union republics is not applicable to "autonomous" republics, and because it was unclear in a number of cases how much ethnic grievances were simply being exploited by traditionalist local leaders on cue from the Russian Communist Party and the center. Gorbachev himself may also have come to appreciate the danger of playing with this potentially dreadful invitation to ethnic violence, or he may simply have been forced to give in to reach agreement with Yel'tsin and other republic leaders on 23 April. Nevertheless, the "autonomies" issue will remain a possible source of major trouble in the RSFSR for the foreseeable future. [REDACTED]

An even more explosive dimension of the "Lebanon" problem for Soviet leaders is how to protect minorities living *outside* their "native" borders. Success or failure on this score will go far toward determining whether endemic communal violence lies in store for Eurasia, or whether the United States will be dealing with a more peaceful dismantlement of the empire and the establishment of a relatively large and stable successor formation to the present USSR. One approach—that has been linked to preserving a unitary state—is the wager on external intimidation, provocation, and limited intervention. For reasons noted above, Yel'tsin argues simply on empirical grounds that this approach will not work. Instead, he offers a treaty approach that accepts republic sovereignty and—he believes—provides at least a chance of coping with the ethnic minority problem in a way that does not reinforce the cycle of repression, retaliation, and mass flight of refugees. The costs of miscalculation and failure here are very high indeed, for the West as well as Moscow. [REDACTED]

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